

Cultural Experiences and Consumer Engagement in the Creative Economy: Implications for Cultural Marketing

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The creative economy has changed the way cultural institutions define their economic and social role. Museums, festivals, performing arts organizations and heritage sites no longer operate only as spaces of artistic presentation, but also as environments in which audiences search for memorable, meaningful and participatory experiences. This article analyses the relationship between cultural experiences and consumer engagement in the creative economy, with emphasis on the contribution of experiential marketing, cultural storytelling and audience participation to the sustainability of cultural markets. The paper uses a qualitative exploratory approach based on academic literature, institutional reports and secondary indicators concerning cultural participation. The analysis shows that cultural experiences strengthen consumer engagement by combining emotional value, educational value, social interaction and symbolic meaning. Cultural festivals, museum visits and performing arts events are discussed as relevant forms of experiential cultural consumption. The findings indicate that cultural organizations can improve audience loyalty and market visibility by integrating experience-oriented marketing strategies with cultural management practices. The article contributes to economic debates on cultural industries by highlighting the role of experiential value in the creation of economic, cultural and social benefits.

Keywords: creative economy; cultural experiences; consumer engagement; cultural marketing; cultural consumption; cultural institutions.

1. Introduction

The creative economy has become an important field of economic analysis because it brings together cultural production, symbolic value, innovation and market exchange. Unlike traditional sectors, creative industries rely on knowledge, artistic talent, intellectual property and the capacity of organizations to transform cultural meanings into products, services and experiences. The economic importance of this field is visible in employment, tourism, urban regeneration and the development of cultural entrepreneurship. At the same time, the creative economy has a strong social dimension because cultural participation contributes to identity, education, inclusion and quality of life (UNESCO, 2022).

In this context, cultural experiences represent a central element of contemporary cultural markets. Consumers are increasingly interested in activities that create emotional involvement, personal meaning and social interaction. The visit to a museum, participation in a festival or attendance at a theatre performance is not perceived only as a transaction, but as an experience that can generate memories, knowledge and a sense of belonging. This experiential dimension is particularly relevant for cultural organizations, because their value

proposition is based not only on the artistic product itself, but also on the way in which audiences interact with it (Throsby, 2001).

Consumer engagement has therefore become a key concept for understanding cultural participation. In marketing literature, engagement refers to the cognitive, emotional and behavioral connection developed between consumers and organizations, brands or experiences. In cultural markets, engagement appears when visitors actively participate in cultural activities, return to the same institution, recommend events to other people or interact with cultural content through digital platforms (Brodie, et al, 2011). For cultural institutions, engagement is important because it supports both cultural relevance and economic sustainability.

The purpose of this article is to examine how cultural experiences contribute to consumer engagement in the creative economy. The paper focuses on the economic and marketing implications of cultural experiences, considering museums, cultural festivals, performing arts institutions and heritage sites as relevant examples. The article is structured around five sections. The first section introduces the topic and the research objective. The second section reviews the literature on the creative economy, experiential consumption, cultural participation and engagement. The third section presents the methodological approach. The fourth section discusses secondary data and a case-based analysis of cultural experiences and engagement factors. The final section presents discussion, conclusions and implications for cultural marketing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The creative economy and cultural industries

The term creative economy refers to the system of activities in which creativity, culture and intellectual capital generate economic value. It includes sectors such as cultural heritage, performing arts, design, publishing, audiovisual production, music, digital media and related creative services. These sectors are important because they combine market activity with cultural expression and symbolic production. Creative industries are not limited to entertainment; they also influence tourism, education, urban development, innovation and international visibility (Howkins, 2001).

From an economic perspective, the creative economy is relevant because it produces both tangible and intangible value. Cultural goods and services may generate direct revenues through tickets, subscriptions, retail sales and tourism spending. However, they also create indirect benefits, such as place branding, local attractiveness, community development and the stimulation of related businesses. Cultural institutions can therefore be understood as economic actors that contribute to regional development while preserving cultural heritage and supporting artistic production (OECD, 2022).

The growth of creative industries has also changed the managerial responsibilities of cultural organizations. Museums, theatres and festivals must balance artistic mission with audience development, financial sustainability and public accountability. Marketing is no longer a secondary administrative function, but an

essential instrument for communicating cultural value, understanding audience expectations and building long-term relationships with visitors (Kotler, Scheff, 1997).

2.2. Experiential consumption in cultural markets

The concept of the experience economy suggests that consumers increasingly value memorable experiences rather than only products or services (Pine, Gilmore, 1999). Cultural consumption is one of the clearest examples of this transformation. A concert, an exhibition or a cultural festival creates value through emotions, atmosphere, interpretation and interaction. The cultural consumer is not simply buying access to an event; the consumer is participating in a symbolic and social process.

Cultural experiences contain several dimensions. The emotional dimension is related to the feelings generated by artistic content. The cognitive dimension concerns learning, interpretation and intellectual stimulation. The social dimension refers to interaction with other participants, family, friends or communities. The symbolic dimension is connected with identity, values and cultural belonging. When these dimensions are successfully integrated, cultural experiences can generate strong engagement and satisfaction (Addis, 2005).

Experiential cultural consumption is also influenced by cultural capital. Individuals differ in their familiarity with artistic forms, cultural codes and heritage narratives. These differences shape preferences, expectations and the ability to interpret cultural content. However, contemporary cultural institutions increasingly try to reduce participation barriers through accessible communication, interactive design and educational programs (Bourdieu, 1984).

2.3. Consumer engagement and audience participation

Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes emotional attachment, cognitive involvement and behavioral participation (Hollebeek, et al, 2014). In cultural markets, engagement may appear in several forms: attendance, repeated visits, membership, volunteering, donations, online interaction, word-of-mouth recommendation or participation in educational activities. Engagement is therefore broader than satisfaction because it reflects an active relationship between audiences and cultural organizations.

Audience participation is essential for the sustainability of cultural institutions. Cultural organizations depend on visitors not only for direct revenues, but also for legitimacy, public support and social impact. Engaged audiences are more likely to support institutions during periods of uncertainty, to participate in community programs and to contribute to the symbolic visibility of cultural spaces (European Commission, 2023).

Digital communication has expanded the forms of engagement available to cultural institutions. Social media, virtual tours, online exhibitions, newsletters and digital storytelling allow organizations to maintain contact with audiences before and after the physical visit. These tools are particularly useful for attracting younger audiences and for extending cultural experiences beyond the limits of the cultural venue (Simon, 2010).

2.4. Cultural marketing and experiential value

Cultural marketing has a specific character because it must respect the artistic mission of institutions while responding to market conditions. Unlike commercial marketing, cultural marketing cannot reduce the cultural product only to consumer demand. It must communicate artistic and cultural value in a way that is accessible, credible and attractive for different audience segments (Kotler, Scheff, 1997).

Experiential marketing is particularly suitable for cultural institutions because cultural activities are naturally connected with emotion, narrative, sensory stimulation and participation. Marketing campaigns can emphasize the atmosphere of an event, the story behind an exhibition, the uniqueness of a heritage site or the social experience of a festival. Such strategies help audiences understand why participation is valuable and why the experience is different from other leisure alternatives (Pine, Gilmore, 1999).

Audience segmentation is another relevant tool. Families, students, tourists, professionals and older adults may have different motivations for cultural participation. Some visitors seek education, others look for entertainment, relaxation, prestige or social interaction. By identifying these motivations, cultural institutions can design communication strategies, pricing policies and participation formats that respond to diverse expectations (Colbert, 2014).

3. Methodology

The article uses a qualitative exploratory research design. This approach is appropriate because the relationship between cultural experiences and consumer engagement involves economic, social and marketing dimensions. The research does not aim to test a statistical model, but to identify relevant patterns, mechanisms and implications for cultural institutions operating in the creative economy.

The study is based on secondary data and document analysis. The sources include academic literature on creative industries, experiential marketing, consumer engagement and cultural economics, as well as institutional reports published by international organizations. The analysis also uses indicative secondary data to illustrate the types of cultural experiences preferred by consumers and the main factors that influence engagement. The figures and tables presented in the article are used for analytical illustration and are interpreted in relation to the literature.

The analytical framework follows three dimensions. The first dimension refers to the creation of cultural experiences by institutions through events, exhibitions, performances and heritage interpretation. The second dimension concerns the forms of consumer engagement generated by these experiences, including emotional connection, participation and loyalty. The third dimension refers to the marketing strategies that can strengthen engagement, especially storytelling, digital communication and audience segmentation.

The main limitation of the study is the absence of primary data collected directly from visitors. Future research could use surveys, interviews or focus groups to measure the relationship between visitor motivations,

satisfaction and engagement. Despite this limitation, the exploratory approach is useful for clarifying the economic and marketing significance of cultural experiences within the creative economy.

4. Analysis: Cultural Experiences and Consumer Engagement

4.1. Forms of cultural experiences

Cultural experiences can take many forms, but cultural festivals, museum visits, performing arts events and heritage tourism are among the most visible examples. Each form creates a different type of value for consumers. Festivals usually combine entertainment, social participation and cultural traditions. Museums combine education, aesthetic appreciation and heritage interpretation. Performing arts events provide live emotional intensity and artistic interaction. Heritage tourism connects cultural consumption with place identity and local economic development.

Table 1 presents an indicative distribution of preferred cultural experiences. The data should be interpreted as an analytical synthesis rather than as a representative survey. Its purpose is to show how different types of cultural participation may contribute to consumer engagement.

Table 1. Types of cultural experiences preferred by consumers

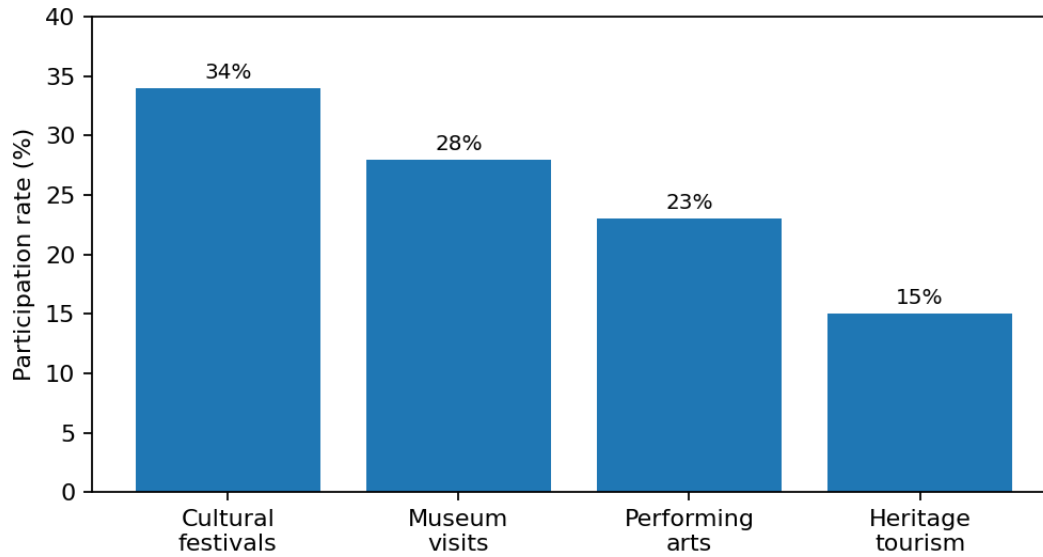
Cultural experience	Participation rate (%)
Cultural festivals	34
Museum visits	28
Performing arts events	23
Heritage tourism	15

Source: Author’s synthesis based on cultural participation literature and institutional reports UNESCO, European Commission, UNWTO.

The table suggests that cultural festivals have a strong capacity to attract audiences because they combine several experiential elements in the same setting. They are usually accessible, dynamic and socially oriented. Their value is not limited to the artistic program; it also includes the atmosphere, the possibility of interaction and the association with local identity.

Museum visits occupy an important position because they provide cultural learning and aesthetic experience. Contemporary museums increasingly use multimedia installations, participatory exhibitions and educational activities in order to transform the visit into an immersive experience. Performing arts events remain relevant because live performance creates emotional intensity and direct contact between artists and audiences. Heritage tourism, although more specific, generates economic value through travel, accommodation, local services and destination branding.

Figure 1. Types of cultural experiences preferred by consumers



Source: Author’s synthesis based on cultural participation literature and institutional reports UNESCO, European Commission, UNWTO.

4.2. Factors influencing engagement

Consumer engagement in cultural experiences is influenced by multiple factors. Cultural interest is often the first motivation, because individuals participate when they are attracted by artistic content, heritage narratives or cultural identity. However, engagement is not explained only by individual interest. Social experience, educational motivation and entertainment value also shape participation decisions.

Table 2 summarizes four relevant engagement factors. Cultural interest has the highest weight, followed by social experience, educational motivation and entertainment value. The distribution illustrates the fact that cultural participation is complex: audiences may search for knowledge, emotions, leisure and social belonging at the same time.

Table 2. Factors influencing consumer engagement in cultural experiences

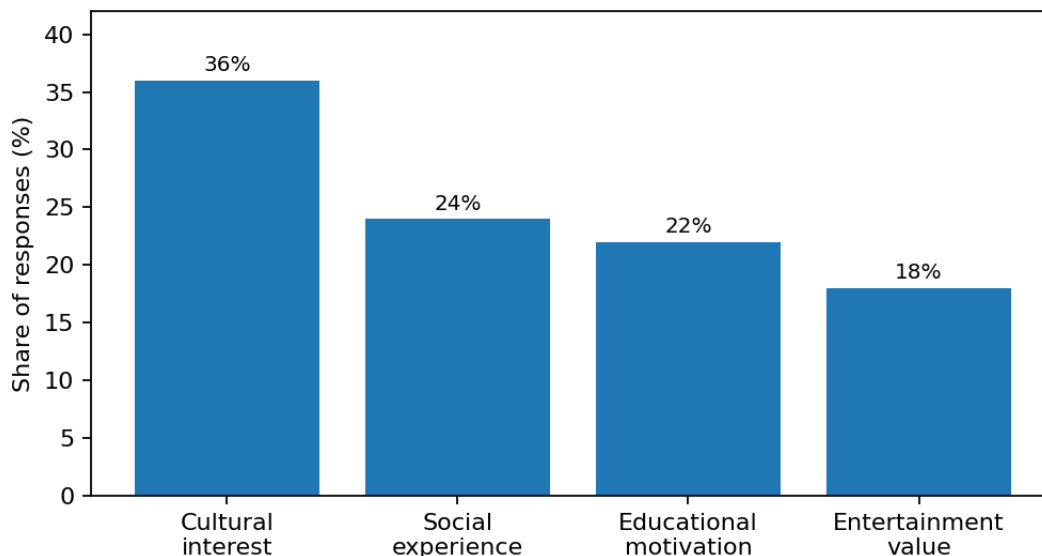
Factor	Percentage (%)
Cultural interest	36
Social experience	24
Educational motivation	22
Entertainment value	18

Source: Author’s synthesis based on engagement and cultural marketing studies (Brodie et all 2011), (Hollebeek, et all, 2014), (Colbert, 2014).

Cultural interest is connected with the intrinsic value that consumers attribute to artistic and heritage activities. People who perceive culture as personally meaningful are more likely to attend events and to develop loyalty toward institutions. Social experience is also important because cultural participation often takes place in groups. A festival, exhibition or performance can become a shared memory and a form of social connection.

Educational motivation is particularly relevant for museums, heritage sites and cultural programs aimed at students or families. Learning opportunities increase the perceived value of the cultural experience. Entertainment value should not be seen as opposed to cultural value. In many cases, entertainment makes cultural participation more accessible and helps institutions attract broader audiences without abandoning their cultural mission.

Figure 2. Factors influencing consumer engagement in cultural experiences



Source: Author’s synthesis based on engagement and cultural marketing studies (Brodie et all 2011), (Hollebeek, et all, 2014), (Colbert, 2014).

4.3. Economic implications for cultural institutions

The economic implications of cultural experiences are significant. First, engaging experiences can increase attendance and repeat participation. When visitors perceive that an event is memorable and meaningful, they are more likely to return and to recommend it to others. This contributes to ticket revenues, memberships and donations. Second, cultural experiences stimulate related economic activities such as tourism, hospitality,

transport and local retail. Festivals and heritage sites often generate benefits that extend beyond the cultural institution itself (OECD, 2022).

Third, consumer engagement contributes to institutional resilience. Cultural organizations that build strong audience relationships are better positioned to respond to competition from digital entertainment and to changes in leisure behavior. Engagement also supports public legitimacy, because institutions with active audiences can demonstrate their cultural and social relevance more clearly.

Fourth, cultural experiences influence place branding. Cities and regions often use museums, festivals and heritage assets to communicate attractiveness, creativity and identity. Cultural experiences therefore become part of the economic positioning of a destination. This is particularly relevant for cultural tourism, where visitors choose destinations based on the uniqueness and quality of cultural experiences (UNWTO, 2018).

4.4. Marketing strategies for stronger engagement

The analysis suggests several marketing strategies that can strengthen consumer engagement. The first strategy is experiential design. Cultural institutions should design events and exhibitions that offer visitors opportunities to participate, interact and interpret cultural content. This does not mean transforming all cultural activities into entertainment, but creating contexts in which audiences feel involved and respected as active participants.

The second strategy is cultural storytelling. Stories help audiences understand the meaning of an exhibition, performance or heritage site. Effective storytelling connects artistic content with human experiences, historical context and contemporary relevance. It can be used in brochures, websites, guided tours, social media content and educational materials.

The third strategy is digital engagement. Cultural institutions can use digital platforms to communicate before, during and after the visit. Online campaigns can present behind-the-scenes content, artist interviews, visitor testimonials and interactive materials. Digital communication also supports community building and can maintain engagement between physical events.

The fourth strategy is inclusive audience development. Institutions should identify barriers that prevent participation, including price, language, accessibility, lack of information and the perception that cultural institutions are not relevant for certain groups. Educational partnerships, discounted tickets, community programs and accessible communication can expand participation and create long-term audience relationships.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The article shows that cultural experiences are a key mechanism through which the creative economy creates value. Their importance is not limited to artistic enjoyment. Cultural experiences generate economic value through attendance, tourism, local spending and institutional sustainability. They also generate social value by supporting education, identity, inclusion and community interaction. For this reason, consumer engagement should be understood as both a marketing objective and a cultural management priority.

The findings indicate that festivals, museums, performing arts events and heritage tourism each contribute to engagement in different ways. Festivals are attractive because they combine entertainment, cultural expression and social participation. Museums contribute through learning and interpretation. Performing arts institutions create emotional intensity through live artistic interaction. Heritage tourism connects cultural consumption with destination identity and local development.

The analysis also highlights the importance of motivations. Cultural interest remains the most important factor, but social experience, educational motivation and entertainment value are also relevant. Cultural institutions should therefore avoid a narrow understanding of their audiences. Visitors may seek knowledge, emotional experience, social connection and leisure at the same time. Marketing strategies must reflect this diversity.

From a managerial perspective, cultural institutions should integrate experiential marketing with their cultural mission. This integration requires careful balance. Cultural organizations should not reduce artistic value to market demand, but they should communicate cultural value in a way that is understandable and engaging for contemporary audiences. Experience-oriented strategies can help institutions attract new visitors, strengthen loyalty and improve their economic sustainability.

Digital tools offer additional opportunities, but they should support rather than replace physical cultural experiences. Online communication can extend the reach of cultural institutions, maintain audience relationships and encourage participation. However, the distinctive value of many cultural experiences remains connected with presence, atmosphere and direct interaction.

In conclusion, cultural experiences represent an essential factor in consumer engagement within the creative economy. Cultural institutions that combine artistic quality, storytelling, participation and inclusive communication are better positioned to create economic and social value. Future research should examine this relationship through empirical methods, especially visitor surveys and comparative studies between different cultural institutions. Such research would provide deeper insight into how audiences evaluate cultural experiences and how engagement contributes to the long-term sustainability of creative economies.

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